

PRESS CONFERENCE WITH MAJORITY LEADER

STENY H. HOYER

Wednesday, May 11, 2022

11:04 a.m.

Mr. Hoyer. First, I want to speak to the Roe v. Wade issue. It is an overarching issue, obviously, in terms of a 50-year precedent being overturned -- presumably, if the version of the opinion that we have seen and been made public is what, in fact, ends up being the case and we all have a 50-year precedent overturned.

And, as Collins and Murkowski have indicated, at least two of the judges who have been confirmed recently, at least those two who voted for both of those appointees are somewhat disappointed by their vote because they think there was a misrepresentation made as to the importance of the precedent and the fact that that was established precedent and the implication being that it was established precedent.

And so that would be -- what would be [inaudible]. That's not the case, of course. I am very disappointed, I'm angry that this, obviously, has been a concerted effort by McConnell and by others -- and certainly by President Trump -- to accomplish a political objective through the courts.

And they have been unable to accomplish it in the Congress through either statutory language or constitutional amendment. And they have now, therefore, accomplished the objective -- presumably.

Again, we don't know what the final decision's going to be until it's really issued. It hasn't been issued yet.

But overturning both Roe and Planned Parenthood v. Casey, it is, I think, one of the most egregious assaults on the rights of women that we've had in the history of the country. And there have been others, obviously, as well, not the least of which was the ability to vote until a constitutional amendment was adopted in the first part of the last century.

But one of the first votes I cast -- I was elected to the Maryland State Senate in 1966, I had just gotten out of Georgetown Law School 5 months before, and I went -- one of the very first votes I cast was to repeal the miscegenation statute in the State of Maryland.

Now, it had been -- the case had been decided some years before that, so it was no longer unconstitutional, in the Loving case -- ironic name -- and I voted, of course, to repeal the miscegenation statute, which tried to tell people who they could marry at that point in time, not related to gender, but related to race, nationality, and ethnic differences.

I thought that was wrong, and it was overwhelmingly appealed, and the Supreme Court had already said it was unconstitutional.

But this premise that Mr. Alito puts forward and apparently the majority of the court adopt, that it wasn't mentioned in the Constitution, I said in the caucus today, the genius of our Constitution, which was adopted, obviously, in 1787 and went into effect in 1789, essentially, was that it was written in a way that it could accommodate the change in culture, society, size, et cetera, et cetera, awareness, wisdom, new way of thinking. The Constitution was adaptable, and that's why it's lasted for over 225 years.

So this decision harks back to this originalist idea, that whatever they thought then was what we're going to think now, do now.

The Founders had no such arrogance, which is why they wrote a broadly worded Constitution. The Dred Scott decision, written by Roger Brooke Taney from Maryland, in effect said that Dred Scott was not a person, couldn't be a person, African-Americans couldn't be persons because the Founders didn't consider them so.

Interestingly enough, Roger Brooke Taney said: If we were considering it now, 80 years later, we would have a different view. But he found himself handcuffed -- and

this is not excusable -- found himself handcuffed, he said, by what they thought in 1787 when they wrote the Constitution.

That's what this does and it's as bad as the Dred Scott decision and so we need to act. We have overwhelming -- I think you've gotten -- I'm not saying you've gotten it yet.

When are we going to hand out the polling data?

Staff. Right after.

Mr. Hoyer. Okay. You'll get -- and I think you probably know most of the polling, but there were overwhelmingly, we're talking 58, 60, 65 percent of the American people, they may have nuanced views about abortion itself, but they're pretty focused on the court should not be ruling this and it's constitutional to prohibit it.

They don't belabor over [inaudible]. I share that view. We've already taken action legislatively here. We'll see what the Senate does shortly. But we're going to continue to fight to make sure that a woman's right to make her own decisions on her healthcare are protected and are, in fact, constitutionally recognized.

Break down the floor schedule. You know what we're doing this week. Yesterday we passed 86.5 percent of the vote for \$40 billion, give or take a few dollars, on Ukrainian aid. We're defending freedom here and around the world. That was Kennedy's phrase, and that's what we're doing by investing in Ukraine.

Some of you have asked me how much do you think the Congress is willing to give. My response to that is everything they need. This is our fight.

I just talked to the Nordic Council this morning. Some of you probably know my father was born in Copenhagen, so I'm close to the Danes, but also the Norwegians, the Swedes, and the Finnish, who want to join together now.

Putin is analogous to, in my opinion, Hitler and Stalin in his actions that he is

pursuing in Ukraine and will go down as one of the despots of -- another Russian despot, violent, murderous, uncaring about law and morality.

So we passed that last night. I was very pleased that we got such a big vote.

We could've passed it on suspension. [Inaudible] more vote on it, but it went quickly. [Inaudible] large sum of money, largely done on an agenda of about 2 weeks, so there was [inaudible] but the final package was what the Senate would agree to and so we passed it.

Otherwise, as you know, we have a bill on firefighters, very important bill, which essentially recognizes, gives Federal firefighters the same presumptions as state and local firefighters have in terms when they get heart disease or some other pulmonary disease, that it is a presumption that it was work related. It can be rebutted, but there's a presumption. That's what almost all state and local professional firefighters have.

And then on Thursday we'll do the TSA bill, which, again, is an extension. When we adopted the Transportation Safety Act we put in a proviso that they would not have all the rights that are given to Title 5 civil servants. This simply -- Congressman Thompson's bill simply makes Title 5 applicable to all Federal employees, including TSA employees.

And then on Friday, we'll do the act that deals with the Community Services Block Grants and reauthorization of that for 5 years. Very important for local governments. They use that for a lot of different projects. That'll get a vote.

And then next week we'll be dealing with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, which, again, is to try to forward the working conditions and opportunities for people.

And then we're going to consider a bill that deals with price gauging. There were other bills being concerned. Obviously, a lot people are worried about inflation. The

President said, made a statement yesterday, making that a very, very high priority on this, which it ought to be. The American people are being greatly stressed by this inflation.

We had a little bit of good news, but very little, in terms of this week's report. But that needs to be a high priority. Of course, gas prices are part of that.

We need to pass, frankly, the infrastructure bill. The President has issued orders for the Strategic Petroleum Reserve to be used. That has had some effect. But, obviously, we also need to be concerned about supply for Europe. Bulgaria and Poland, as you know, have been cut off from Russia. So we have a lot of problems here with energy and gas prices.

The other thing that just has come up recently -- I don't have any small children. I live alone. Don't have any small children. All my daughters are older than all of you. And while I do have great-grandchildren, and I know that my granddaughter Judy is worried about baby formula and my staff is worried about it --

[Laughter.]

Mr. Hoyer. [Inaudible] many of them, the mothers and small children in this room, but my chief of staff has two small children, Courtney Fry, who runs the floor for us, very small children. Brian Romick, some of you know, my deputy chief of staff, has a 5-year-old.

Now, a 5-year-old's not on baby food; I get that. But it is a real problem and we are hearing from a lot of people about this.

I talked to the chairmen this morning about it. Rosa DeLauro has been looking into this on the Appropriations Committee. I've talked to Frank Pallone today. I think he's going to have hearings on this. I also talked to Carolyn Maloney, who chairs the Government Operations Committee, about this.

And I'd expect all of them to be looking at what's the deal here with baby formula.

Why is there such a shortage? What happened? There are a number of -- what did the FDA do or not do? And what's the deal on the supply chain?

Lastly, let me take some sort of personal privilege. I have a bill in that's called the AMAZON Act. The AMAZON Act stands for -- you know these acronyms. You really have to work hard at these acronyms. The American Mitigating and Achieving Zero-emissions Originating from Nature Act. It just rolls off your tongue. I'm sure all of you right now have all written it down, the AMAZON Act.

And the reason I put this bill in is, first of all, because I've been thinking about it for a very long time. First time I thought about it was 20 years ago I was here, I'd say.

You know, the problem with a forest that we need to keep and carbon signals and [inaudible] and other and signals is that if you have gasoline to sell or iron ore to sell and somebody can take it out of the ground, you send it to someone and they pay you for it.

With respect to the rain forest, you want them to keep the tree in the ground, right, so you can continue to produce oxygen that we breathe and we all use it, but we use it for free. And we need to have some compensation so that the farmer who wants to support his family and is living on the -- some of his property is in the Amazon rain forest or some other carbon signal gives some remuneration for the use of those trees that we all use. We don't think we use them, because we don't see them.

So this bill essentially follows up. The administration asked for \$9 billion for USAID to have a fund, revolving fund, in league with other industrialized nations of the world to assist countries that have these rain forests and carbon signals to keep them in place, to protect them, and give some compensation for doing so, so that there's a financial incentive to do what we need to do for the global climate change.

So that bill's going to have a hearing tomorrow. Greg Meeks is a cosponsor, Bob Menendez in the Senate is a cosponsor. He's looking for a Republican cosponsor. I

hope this week we'll get the bipartisan advocates of this bill and I hope we have some bipartisan -- I've talked to Mr. McConnell about it. I hope he signs on the bill as well.

There's a Republican who has a bill in about [inaudible] trees, which I think is a good idea as well, but you need to make sure that the trees, which are older tree and that we do have are standing so they can perform their truly biological function, helping clean the air and take the carbon out of it.

Okay. You'll get the polling data at the end. I'm done.

Staff. [Inaudible] we'll alternate between Mr. Hoyer answering questions here and then, as folks raise their hands, calling on folks over Zoom.

Q First, it's great to be in this room and not in Zoom.

I want to ask about COVID relief, what the latest with that is. Do you have a sense of timing? Do you like what the \$10 billion deal is in the Senate? Do you think it needs to be more? What is the version of COVID --

Mr. Hoyer. Well, as you know, we passed -- I didn't mean to interrupt you. You finished? I'm sorry.

Q Yeah.

Mr. Hoyer. Okay. As you know, we passed -- we passed? We wanted to pass the \$15 billion bill, 10 and 5, 5 dealing with international challenges obviously.

Like the weather, the pandemic was not limited to any geographical area and, therefore, when we have international spikes, as China is now experiencing now but other nations as well, it puts a risk on everybody.

So we think -- I think the President's original request of \$22 billion, which he probably thought ought to be higher than that, was justified. We made a compromise. As you know, the funding -- the Republicans demanded that it be paid for. We think this clearly continues to be an emergency. But nevertheless, we were prepared to do that

and we did do that.

The \$10 billion bill in the Senate is critically necessary for here at home, particularly for vaccines and for testing. Other things as well, but for those two things, so there are sufficient vaccines available. Manufacturing was shut down because they're not sure they're going to be able to sell their vaccine. And testing capacity, the President wanted to send to every home testing capability. You cannot do that [inaudible] to do that.

So we think this bill is a very, very important bill. There's a lot of negotiation going on. There was some talk about putting on the Ukraine bill. The Republicans were not interested in doing that. That's fine, I think we all want to get the Ukraine bill done ASAP. You know, they need it now not only for the military, but also the humanitarian crisis, the food crisis that confronts us.

So the answer to your question is, I'm hopeful that we will move a COVID bill soon. Obviously, negotiations continue in the Senate about getting that done and what you pay for and what you include.

But the basic needs that the 10 billion covered for this country is critical. We should've passed that yesterday or the day before. It's late now.

I think I told you at the last one we had was that Tony Fauci and the Secretary of Health and Human Services, former Member, both came here a month ago and said this is critical to get done.

So it's way past time, and we're working very hard to try to get consensus together. But the Republicans don't seem to think that there's a critical need, but that's not surprising because the President of the United States who they supported at that point in time told us in March of 2020 this is going to go away in a few days.

If you had the concept that somehow this is going to go away in a few days, the

urgency isn't quite as apparent, which is tragic because we have a million deaths since that time, a million deaths-plus since that time.

Staff. Our next question will come from Zoom. Our next question today is going to come from Kelly Phares with FOX News.

You can respond to the unmute prompt to ask your question?

Q Hey there, Leader Hoyer. Thank you for doing this.

Mr. Hoyer. Hi, Kelly.

Q My question for you is about a bill that moved quickly through the Senate this week and has come over to the House on protecting Supreme Court Justices. That bill was authored by Senator Cornyn and Senator Coons.

I'm wondering if you have a timeline for when the House might take that up. Obviously, it moved through the Senate rather quickly. Is that a plan for it to go through the House as well?

Mr. Hoyer. First of all, let me say emphatically, we need to protect Supreme Court Justices and their families, period. We're a Nation of laws, not of violence, not of intimidation. We're a Nation of laws. We've railed against the insurrection, which was an attempt to make "by might, not by right," and clearly we want to protect Supreme Court Justices, whether we agree with them or disagree with them. They need to be protected and not fear for their life if they make one decision or the other, number one.

Number two, you're right, they just passed it, they passed it quickly. I hadn't talked to the committee chairs about it. I don't know off the top of my head, maybe you know, maybe it was in the bill, how much, if there was any figure or some such sums as are necessary, I don't know.

But we're certainly going to look at it and we're going to look at it quickly. But I would urge anybody, no matter how strongly they feel about an issue, that threats and

intimidation to members of the Supreme Court, Members of the Congress of the United States, the President, other officials, is not acceptable in a country that prides itself on being a Nation of laws and not of men.

So we're going to look at it as quickly -- I don't -- it just passed. When we look at it, we're going to talk with the chair and see what kind of legislation we'll put forward.

Q I know that the [inaudible] conference group is beginning to meet tomorrow, I believe. I wanted to see if you had any thoughts on what the timeline needs to be for getting a final product for that or anything specific that was in the House bill, not in the Senate bill, that you are pushing to see in the final product.

Mr. Hoyer. A, it's a high priority. I see it as a third leg of a four-legged stool to assist the economy, bring inflation down, make sure that people have job opportunities and education and healthcare, and those are, obviously, the Rescue Plan that we passed, the infrastructure bill that we passed, COMPETES bill or USICA or whatever we're going to call it in the final analysis bill, the competitive bill, and then Build Back Better. Those are the four.

I'm very focused on getting those two done. As you know, I meet with the committee chairmen every Wednesday morning at 8 o'clock, 8:15, and I talk to them about the COMPETES bill. The Senate's appointed its conferees and conferees are about to get started.

So I'm pushing that very, very hard. I talk to all the committee chairmen on our side. I think we have 11 or 12 who are members of the conference committee and interfacing with their Senate counterparts. I've urged them to do so with a sense of urgency of getting this bill done because I think it will help bring down inflation. I think it will give confidence.

And, of course, the \$52 billion in there for chips is absolutely critical in terms of

shortages of automobiles, refrigerators, everything else that has chips in them, which is almost everything electronically that we deal with today.

Lastly, your question was, am I focused on a particular thing that was in that House bill but not in the Senate bill? The answer to that is yes.

I've had an agenda for a long time called Make It In America Agenda, as I think you may know. Part of that Make It In America Agenda was apprenticeships. That was in the House bill, it wasn't in the Senate bill, and I hope that it will be in the final product.

I've talked to a number of the Senate conferees and I've talked to the chair of the Health Committee over there, Patty Murray, and I've talked also to -- from Indiana -- Republican from Indiana --

Q Todd Young?

Mr. Hoyer. Yes, Todd Young. I talked to Todd Young about it as well.

So that would be the -- there are a lot of things, but that would be my number one goal of getting apprenticeships. And I talked to McCarthy about it last night, as a matter of fact. He also agrees that apprenticeships are very, very important. And so I think he'll be an ally in getting it in there.

Having said that, I want to make it clear so nobody writes that I said McCarthy's for it, they have a program under Trump that they like very much that we don't think has got the standings or regulations necessary to make sure that the apprentice gets what they pay or what we pay for. We're involved in that.

So I think we need to reach compromise, and I'm asking my people to work with Mr. McCarthy's people to see if we can get to an agreement.

Q Can I ask a follow-on?

Mr. Hoyer. Sure.

Q Senator Wyden yesterday said he'd like to get a couple pack (ph) provisions

into USICA/COMPETES [inaudible]. Would you favor that or do you want to keep it clean?

Mr. Hoyer. What I would do is talk to [inaudible]. That's what I would do.

Both sides are very, very -- and, of course, the Constitution gives us [inaudible] in terms of revenues. So I'll see what Richie Neal has to say before I would opine myself.

Staff. We are running a teeny bit late, but we got started a little bit late, so I'll just jump to -- we'll keep trying [inaudible].

Mr. Hoyer. Okay. I'll try to be brief in my answers.

Staff. Next question today will come from George Cahlink with E&E News.

George, follow the unmute prompt to ask your question.

Q Thanks. Sorry I'm not on video. I'll figure it out next time.

But I wanted to ask you about the price gouging legislation you mentioned that's going to be on the floor next week. Is this the FTC oversight bill that we've talked or is there going to be something in there related to rebates --

Mr. Hoyer. The answer's yes. It's the FTC. Yep.

Q Follow-up on COVID aid. It sounded like you guys are going to negotiate this as a four corners bill versus doing a Democrat-preferred version of COVID aid. Is that correct?

Mr. Hoyer. All the options are on the table. But it's critical to get it done, and the fastest way to get it done is to have an agreement on the four corners.

Q [Inaudible.]

Mr. Hoyer. Well, it's certainly a priority for House Democrats. We think that needs to be extended.

Now, whether or not it can get in this bill, the absolute essentials are vaccines and testing here. Next absolute essential is to make sure that people around the world are

getting some help as well.

Now, we're not alone on that. Europe, obviously, engaged in doing that, Japan engaged in doing that. So it's not like we're doing it alone, but we need to have a worldwide effort to try and make sure that that is done.

Staff. Our next question will come from Bryan Metzger with Business Insider.

Q Hi there. Just wanted to ask, in light of the possible overturning of Roe v. Wade, you and other top Democrats have continued to support Congressman Cuellar, who voted against the Women's Health Protection Act in September. I'm wondering how you explain that support for Congressman Cuellar to supporters of abortion rights.

Mr. Hoyer. Well, we're a diverse party and we have diverse opinions. We're overwhelmingly, our platform says that we're a pro-choice party. We are a pro-choice party. That does not mean that there's not room in our party for alternative voices.

I believe Mr. Cuellar has represented his district well, his State well. I think he's a valuable Member of our Congress. And I'm supporting him for reelection?

Q I know we are all waiting for the Senate to vote on a Roe v. Wade protections bill.

Mr. Hoyer. So many things we're waiting for.

Q Yes. That's true.

Mr. Hoyer. Take your pick.

Q I'm curious if there's any conversations among House Democrats to pass potentially smaller bills because a number of Republican State legislatures have been talking about rolling back access to contraception, to Plan B, all these other things that go into women's rights. Are there any conversations about --

Mr. Hoyer. Well, let me answer it in a broader way.

You are absolutely right. This decision, notwithstanding the protestations of Mr.

Alito, Justice Alito, could have very broad ramifications.

That's why I spent a little bit of time at the beginning. It's not mentioned in the Constitution. There are so many issues -- they did not intend to have a laundry list miles long of what they wanted to include. What they did was enunciate broad principles.

So, yes, I'm very worried that State legislatures around the country -- contraception. Now, for all of you in this room, contraception, of course it's contraception. Of course we have availability of the pill or -- that's our choice.

It was not a choice before a Supreme Court ruling in the Connecticut case. And so one could say, well, it's not in the Constitution, you know. Their contraception was the rhythm system, I mean they didn't have any drugs or prescriptions -- or accidents, obviously.

So this is of great concern. So you asked, is there going to be additional legislation? Well, we don't know.

First of all, we haven't even seen the actual decision yet. We've seen what it says. And we know that Alito said in the decision, at least the copy we have had, this does not affect anything else.

I don't know how you can do that, if, in fact, the premise is this is not included in the Constitution and, therefore, it is not a protected right. Well, we think the 14th Amendment covers this, this is what the court said in the opinion [inaudible]. So maybe there will be additional legislation we need to pursue.

Now, of course, I come from Maryland, and Maryland is a State that has gone the other way trying to make sure that that right is protected and, in fact, that the people who perform abortion are broadened so that there will be availability of people to assist in healthcare decisions that women make.

Staff. Our next question will come from Randy [inaudible] with the Washington

Times.

Randy, please follow the unmute prompt to ask your question.

Q Hi, Leader Hoyer.

I know you mentioned that you all will consider the FTC price gouging legislation next week. I was wondering if you all planned to consider any other proposals that your Members have put forward such as a gas tax holiday or rebates or windfall profits tax.

Mr. Hoyer. Let me say that other options are under consideration. So happens that we're doing this one next week. This does not preclude not doing others.

I personally am -- I think the use it or lose it is a good piece of legislation in that our Republican friends continue to say, well, the Biden administration is not allowing people to move forward because they're not issuing new licenses.

In fact, there are millions of acres both on land and -- on public land and at sea that -- I forget the number off the top of my head, but it's millions of acres that is available right now for drilling. And the companies have chosen not to pursue it for whatever reasons. And we all have speculation as to what those reasons are.

But in any event the answer to your question is, there are other options on the table.

Staff. This will be our last question.

Last question. Your call.

Mr. Hoyer. Last question. Okay. Well, one, two, three, four. Very briefly, very brief answers.

Q Where are you on Title 42 right now, on lifting Title 42?

Mr. Hoyer. Title 42, I think where we are is Durbin said yesterday, along with Murray, that they believe it's going to get on the floor and be acted upon. If that happens, we'll have to see what we do here.

Q Quick follow-up on that. If it comes to the House, if it passes with broad bipartisan support, are you going to feel compelled to give that consideration?

Mr. Hoyer. I won't feel compelled to do it, but, obviously, we'll figure out what we're going to do.

Q Can you provide an update on the Domestic Terrorism and Prevention Act?

Mr. Hoyer. I can't.

Q I know it got shelved a couple of weeks ago.

Mr. Hoyer. Which is why I can't give you -- I'll find out for you. I just don't, off the top of my head, I don't know a real credible answer to that. [Inaudible] Hoyer knows what he's talking about. If I told you the present status, I wouldn't be truthful.

Q Will COMPETES pass before the midterms?

Mr. Hoyer. I certainly hope and praying and working towards that objective. I think this is a very, very important bill for the economy. The chips alone are critically important, but so much more is critically important.

And it's so much like my Make It In America Agenda. I don't know how much you've been, you know, know about that. But that's 12 years ago that I came up with it that I felt we needed to focus -- I gave a speech overseas, this is not a short answer -- that said that America and our allies cannot rely on the unreliable.

Relying on China is unreliable. Relying on Russia is unreliable. Relying on other suppliers who are not our friends or allies for critical materials, whether it's pharmaceuticals, whether it's petroleum products, whatever it is, relying on the unreliable proved during the pandemic to be a very bad policy.

In Poland and in Bulgaria now it's a very bad policy relying on Russia, because Russia is cutting them off. They can't do that. They can't run their government.

So I think this bill is critically important for the welfare of our country and for our

competitiveness in the coming decades and for the assurance of supply lines and supplies here in America. So that when you ask whether it's going to be done before the midterms, I am absolutely going to be working towards that objective and I believe it will happen.

Thank you all very much.

[Whereupon, at 11:39 a.m., the press conference was concluded.]